No. 19

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

Before he knew it she had thrown her arms about his neck. It seemed that he was succumbing to her compelling charm. He crushed her to him, and their lips met.

R. of M. G., No. 19.

Copyright 1926 by
THE NIELEN PUBLISHING CO.
Cincinnati, Ohio.

PHILIP GORDON had indeed reasons to be angered at his wife's utter heartlessness. He had never seen a woman like her. Althought she was in the house when her father's prolonged absence became known, she had not taken the trouble to make an inquiry about him.

"Well, it is just like her," he muttered between his set teeth. "Ah, what an unnatural daughter. Good God, I must have been blind when I imagined myself in love with that woman."

The following morning every member of the Gordon household, with the exception of old John Procter, was astir bright and early.

A little before eight o'clock, Nora Evans rushed into the boudoir of her mistress, pale and obviously excited. Alice was seated at her dressing table viewing herself critically in the mirror.

"What's up, Nora?" she asked without turning her head.

"Plenty and then some," the maid returned, breathing hard. "I just heard Mr. Gordon order Mike to get the keys to the tower and that the place was to be searched from top to bottom."

Alice's features turned ghastly white. She half rose from her chair then sank back again.

"Are—are you sure?" she gasped. "Did you hear aright?"

"Just as sure as I am standing here," Nora retorted.

"My God, what are we to do?" Alice's hands were gripped. "My husband must never——" She suddenly broke down and seemed on the verge of becoming hysterical.

"Now don't lose your head," Nora Evans warned. "This is the time for some quick thinking and quicker ac-

tion. I'll do my best. But you must help me. Run downstairs as fast as you can and detain Mr. Gordon for a while. If you can do that, I'll take care of the rest."

Alice stared wild-eyed at the speaker.

"I — I am not half-dressed, Nora," she wailed. "And I am so excited. That alone would arouse his suspicion."

"But you must go," the maid insisted. "If you don't everything is lost indeed. I can get out of it all easy enough, for you hired me to do what I did. But you'll never be able to explain. You'll be in a horrible fix."

Goaded by fear, Alice sprang up.

"Alright—alright!" she gasped. "Help me on with a dressing gown. There is not time for anything else."

With feverish anxiety both women busied themselves for the next ten minutes. As Nora Evans happened to glance out of the window, she saw Philip Gordon going toward the tower accompanied by one of the servants.

"Hurry—oh, we must hurry, Mrs. Gordon!" she exclaimed. "You husband is already on the way."

"For the love of God, what shall I do?" Alice moaned desperately. "What excuse can I make for coming to the tower at this hour and in a dressing gown. Quick, what shall I tell him?"

"There is only one thing to do," replied the girl. "You must do some acting. I can't tell you just what to say. Keep a cool head and handle the situation as you find it. All men are such fools. Yours is no exception. You lied to him before and got away with it. You can do it again."

Alice did not for a moment resent the disrespectful allusion made to Phil. Neither did she make the retort one would expect from her in order to deny her guilt.

"You run ahead through the secret passage," she urged Nora. "I'll follow you."

In the meantime Philip Gordon was walking slowly in the direction of the tower. There was no need of haste. The task before him required thoroughness rather than undue haste.

The man who followed close behind, and who answered to the name of "Mike," listened attentively as his master said something.

They reached their destination and Gordon opened the door leisurely.

"We'll find whether this tower is inhabited by ghosts or human beings," Phil was saying. "Personally I never believed in supernatural things. How about you, Mike?"

"And neither did I," the latter replied heartily.

As they entered a musty smell greeted their nostrils. The lower floor of the tower was for the most part shrouded in darkness.

Only a long slim shaft of light streamed through the narrow window. This happened to fall upon the winding stairway.

Mike glanced down and noticed that the steps were covered thickly with dust. It was not the dust, however, that attracted and held his attention, but the sharply outlined impressions of a woman's foot.

Gordon, having followed the man's protracted gaze, nodded and smiled.

"There is the proof that this tower is not inhabited by ghosts," he declared. "I wouldn't be surprised if we made some very interesting discoveries. It is quite possible that some female desperado has and still is using this tower as a hiding place."

He broke into a laugh into which Mike dutifully joined.

At this moment quick steps sounded behind them. Both men turned simultaneously and were surprised to behold Mrs. Gordon with a sketch book in her hand.

Apparently she was not aware of their presence for she was busily engaged examing the articles in the room.

Philip Gordon coughed slightly to attract Alice.

With a little cry she wheeled upon him.

"Oh, I didn't know you were coming here, Phil," she exclaimed. "My, how you frightened me."

She looked charming—there was no denying that, with rebellious strands of hair caressing cheeks flushed to a rosy tint by the brisk morning air, and perhaps, excitement.

An elegant morning dress, embroidered with costly lace, showed her full and yet graceful form to best advantage.

The eyes of the two men dwelled in open admiration upon the beautiful woman, and the frown that had settled on Philip Gordon's face at first sight of her vanished as if by magic.

Advancing toward Alice, he said in a kindlier tone than he had employed for many weeks when speaking to her:

"Hello. What brings you here to this musty old tower? Really, I did not think you had spunk enough to venture here after all the hideous stories one hears about the place. And it is so early, too. As a rule you sleep until noon."

While the last sentence was tinged with irony, Gordon's remarks were made without rancor as a whole.

Alice tossed her head willfully.

"I quite often do the unexpected, Phil," she answered. "And I do not always sleep until noon. I am well acquainted with all the stories about this tower. And it

might interest you to know that I am in league with the spooks and ghosts who hold their nightly revels here."

As she uttered these words she smiled gamely into her husband's eyes. Neither Phil nor the man with him detected the nervous twitching around the corners of her sensual mouth.

"Well, that is news to me," Gordon declared quickly falling into the woman's all-too apparent jocular mood. "And I suppose you also come here to study astronomy at night like that fool Englishman used to do when he lived here. I remember him telling me that——"

Alice's quick laugh interrupted him.

She had become mistress of the situation with astounding speed. Her husband had given her the cue With the returning sense of security her fears gradually were dispelled.

"This has been my secret until now," she said, still laughing and pointing to her sketchbook. "I was always passionately fond of drawing landscapes. The top of the tower offers some magnificent views of the surrounding country. When the whim takes possession of me, I come here to feast my eyes on the incomparable beauties one sees from the windows."

At this point Mike interposed:

"That explains the footprints on the stairs, Mr. Gordon. They were made by your wife's shapely foot."

Philip Gordon was watching his wife narrowly. His was the attitude of a man gravely in doubt. In two strides he stood at Alice's side and held out his hand.

"May I see the sketches you have made?" he asked. "I am very much interested in that sort of work."

Alice drew back.

She had unexpectedly placed herself in a rather embarrassing position. That sketchbooks of her was perfectly blank. While it was true that she had done

some drawing at college, the art had been sadly neglected in late years.

Again her nimble wit came to her rescue.

With a mischievous laugh she jerked the hand which held the book out of her husband's reach and placed it behind her back.

"Oh, no," she protested. "I am not going to satisfy your curiosity now, Phil. You'll have to wait until the last sketch is finished."

Gordon inclined his head in silent acquiescence. As he moved toward the spiral stairway, Alice accompanied him. Her heart was in her mouth. What if Nora Evans had failed to carry out her part of the work in this short space of time?

Taking a hold of Phil's arm she leaned heavily upon it, affecting a sudden indisposition.

On the first landing she halted, seemingly out of breath.

"What is the matter?" her husband inquired with a curious glance.

"Please wait—a moment," she panted. "I—I am afraid I have overtaxed my strength this morning. I feel somewhat faint and the musty odor in her overpowered me."

Of course, Philip Gordon waited.

After a lengthy pause they went on. He opened a door which led to a room, semi-circular in shape, and filled with all sorts of rubbish. Alice moved slowly to one of the narrow windows and pointed a finger.

"Just look at this, Phil," she cried. "Isn't that a perfectly glorious view? But it is still better from the top floor. And by the way, dear," she added, using the pet-name for the first time since their honeymoon came to such an abrupt end, "I have always wanted to ask a favor of you.

"I would like to have this room fitted up as a studio. I could do some wonderful sketching up here without danger of being disturbed. I am sure you would not mind if I used this room for that purpose, would you?"

Gordon looked at his wife in amazement.

What did it mean? Alice was indeed a puzzle this morning. Why, she seemed like a changed woman. And what had caused this change so obviously for the better?

Instead of craving society frivolities she spoke of engaging in work that was elevating, if not useful.

But another and subtler change had become apparent. There was not trace of Alice's usual arrogance. Her haughtiness had been replaced by personal charm and sweetness.

The deep lustre in her big dark eyes and the gentle modulation of her voice drew him on. He was standing shoulder to shoulder with her now. For the first time in many months he felt almost tempted to caress her.

And yet something within him revolted. No, he would never again be the slave to his aroused senses.

All that attracted him was the wonderful personal charms of this woman. She was desirable — yes, damnably so. Alice seemed aware that Phil's eyes were traveling from the sole of her dainty slippers to the crown of her hair.

Then, like the devastating flash of lightning from a clear sky, came a woman's cry from somewhere.

Philip made a dash for the stairway, but Alice beat him to it.

Quite naturally it appeared as if Alice was very anxious to reach the upper floor from whence the woman's cry had come. And when he attempted to keep her from ascending the stairs, she uttered a low moan.

"Oh, I am so frightened, dear," she said in a voice scarcely above a whisper. "I — I fear I am going to faint."

Gordon received his wife's shuddering form in his outstretched arms.

But even as he held her in the tense silence which had fallen, he thought he heard the sound of swift-moving feet on the floor above.

Alice had heard it, too, and she was determined to retard Phil's progress as much as possible. However, it was utterly impossible to keep him from going upstairs. She realized that as she caught the strange, determined look in his eyes.

She turned cold with dread, for certain disaster lay hidden in the next ten minutes.

Chapter 60

THE REFUSAL

THE DAY had come at last when Carlton McLain was to hear the verdict on his play. Vera Browning had sent for him. So with the manuscript neatly wrapped he walked toward the rather pretentious Browning cottage, his heart beating fast with anticipation.

If the play was a success, his fortune would be made. The royalties alone would insure him a comfortable income. He was not surprised to see several people seated on the wide veranda. Vera always had company.

However, he wondered whether she could give the reading of his play her undivided attention with visitors around.

The first one to greet him was Guy Fillmore, the personal representative of the famous actress, who also acted in the capacity of a press agent.

McLain had met Fillmore on several occasions and he was not quite sure whether he could number him among his friends or not. Guy Fillmore was a very handsome young man, blessed with both, brain and ambition.

But he was in the habit of doing something which aroused Carlton McLain's unqualified disapproval.

He was entirely too attentive to Olive Bentley's lovely young protege—Ruth Gordon. He never missed an opportunity to say a few pleasant things to this charming Chicago miss.

"Where is Vera?" McLain asked rather abruptly.

"In her room upstairs," Fillmore answered. "She told me to take charge of you when you came. First I

am going to introduce you to her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Galvin. I think you will like them, McLain."

Vera Browning's parents proved to be an elderly and very amiable couple. They acknowledged McLain's introduction with charming simplicity.

"We have been hearing quite a great deal about you through our daughter," the mother said with a smile. "So you are the playwright whose work is to add to her fame."

"I—I am not so sure about that," McLain replied modestly. "However, I have done my best and——"

"Your best is bound to be a success," Guy Fillmore broke in. "Now run right upstairs. Vera is waiting for you. The rest of us will enjoy a game of bridge while you read your play to her."

Carlton McLain's heart, for a moment, warmed toward the young man.

"Thank you," he murmured with a courteous bow, and passed in.

A maid intercepted the writer in the hall. She led him upstairs to Miss Browning's sitting room, an apartment that combined the functions of a dressing room and a boudoir.

Vera, seated in a comfortable chair before the wide window which faced the bay, was having her hair done.

She smiled over her shoulder and bade McLain sit down.

"You'll find cigarettes on the table," she told him. "I am having my hair coiffed with greatest care, for I want to look my best. My husband is coming home late this afternoon."

"Oh, is that so," the novelist returned. "So you sent for him, eh?"

"I think I told you I would." After a slight pause

she added: "You see, everything has been arranged for the great denouement. The lady in question has no doubt received my invitation to dinner by this time."

McLain nodded.

"Yes. I saw Miss Bentley this morning. She and Ruth Gordon are both coming to your dinner." He gave the actress a long glance. "By the way, I hope I shall have the pleasure of being a spectator."

"Indeed you shall, Carlton," the actress rejoined quickly. "I did not mail you an invitation because I knew I would have a chance to extend it personally." She glanced toward the parcel he had laid on the table. "Ah, I see you have the play with you. Is it good?"

"It is a knock-out, Vera," he said with enthusiasm. "It had to be since it was built for you."

"Well, I am anxious to hear it, Carlton. Have you named it yet?"

"No. There is plenty of time for that, I think."

"But you ought to decide upon a catchy title as soon as possible, my dear," Miss Browning insisted. "Guy Fillmore is already to put out a story about it. He is some advance agent, believe me. He has all the newspapers primed with advance stuff."

When McLain started to unwrap the manuscript, she stopped him with:

"No, not in here. Wait until my hair is done and we'll go downstairs. We'll shut ourselves in the library and leave word that we are not to be disturbed."

"Very well." McLain indolently relaxed in his chair, a cigarette between his fingers.

He found himself watching the famous actress with keen interest. What a truly wonderful woman she was. She still was ravishingly beautiful although slightly past her youth.

What her age was he made no attempt to guess.

She might be thirty, perhaps forty. He recalled that her name had appeared in large electric signs for a good many years.

Lost to his contemplation of her, he scarcely noticed that the hair-dresser had finished her task and the Vera Browning stood before him.

"Alright, I am ready." Her voice startled him.

They went downstairs together. In the library McLain found himself for the first time a little nervous, and this nervousness grew upon him.

He unwrapped the play, riffled through the manuscript to satisfy himself that the pages were in proper order.

He was seated near the window, with Vera Browning on a chair close by. She seemed to get a great deal of pleasure out of watching his quick, nervous movements.

"You act as though you never read a play to anyone before," she laughed.

"I haven't," he admitted. "This is my first attempt at that sort of thing. And I am so worked up I don't know whether I am coming or going. You see," he added apologetically, "so much depends upon the final result."

"Well, go ahead. I am listening," she told him.

Carlton McLain began to read at once. The first act was laid in the dressing room of the theater in which his heroine was achieving her first triumph. The opening scene occurred during the intermission between the third and fourth acts, at a moment when her fortunes were still in doubt.

The heroine of this play was there. Her manager was there, also her playwright and the young doctor who was desperately in love with her. The scene was finely drawn.

McLain was reading with a fire and conviction,

and before he had turned a dozen pages, the actress cried: "But that heroine of yours is me!"

He looked at her, quick triumph in his eyes.

"Yes," he answered softly.

"And the other characters were also drawn from life—from the circle of my acquaintances and friends," she went on. "The doctor, for instance is Dr. Daniel Pogue, my husband. You are the playwright and this man you depict is my real manager, Mr. Grayson."

"Certainly," McLain confessed. "In this play we are all mad about you. The curtain is down after the third act. We are all in the dressing room with you, wondering about the final success."

"Yes, go on," urged the actress, and McLain proceeded to read.

The second act showed the heroine in a loving pose with the young doctor. He was the man who had made her success possible.

But now she began to show the unpleasant side of her character. She married the doctor as a reward for the sacrifices he made for her, and then she deliberately accepted the adulations of other men.

Perhaps no other playwright ever depicted a woman with more reality and with finer understanding. McLain had written a chapter from Vera Browning's life. He had unwittingly described her as she was.

As he read he snatched an occasional glance at the actress. He saw her face pass from doubt to anger, and from anger to a cold, furious rage.

Toward the end he read more and more swiftly, his mucles tense. But he was not prepared for the bitterness of her rage when he was done.

Vera Browning came from her chair with a movement like that of an animal, and her features were distorted out of all semblance of beauty.

The manuscript she ripped from his hand and crumpled and twisted and tore at it until he wrenched it away from her. Then she burst into a profane tirade, pouring out upon him in course and heedless terms the measure of her resentment and her fury.

It was utterly useless for him to try to silence her.

No matter how hard he tried, he could not get her to listen. Desperate at last, he caught her by both of her wrists and held her in a grip of steel.

It must have been the pain she endured that forced her into silence.

"What is the matter with you?" McLain demanded hotly. "Have you lost your head?"

"Do you think I'd appear in a thing like that?" she hissed.

"Why, it is a big thing," he insisted.

"You are trying to make me the joke of New York," the actress exclaimed. "Why don't you ask me to throw mud at myself."

"This heroine of mine is not you, Vera," he told her with forced calmness. "Don't be so conceited. When I wrote this play I never gave you a thought. This imaginary woman is a character drawn from real life. New York is full of them."

Vera Browing grew somewhat quiet, and she even managed to utter a laugh.

"You poor fool!" she spit out. "If I appeared in that play my career would come to a sudden end. You have pictured me in every detail. Why, my husband would have grounds for a divorce."

"Rubbish!" the playwright snorted, then burst into an unpleasant laugh. "By God, you make me almost believe that you are troubled with a guilty conscience."

She confronted him with flashing eyes.

"Better be careful," she warned him.

McLain realized instantly that he had made a very serious mistake and quickly tried to rectify it. He made all sorts of excuses and finally fell to pleading.

"It is no use," the actress said wearily. "Whether you did it intentionally or not, that play as you wrote it, is an insult to me."

Vera Browning, in her towering rage, utterly overlooked the fact that she was making a fatal admission with her statements.

Carlton McLain had known her scarcely a year. He could not, in that space of time, have gained an insight into her more intimate life.

And yet she accused him of making her the heroine of a play which, she admitted, revealed in detail certain phases of her professional career.

Carlton McLain was too excited to grasp the fact. All he knew was that unless Vera accepted his play, utter ruin stared him in the face. He felt the very foundation of his existence crumble under him.

He had counted so confidently on success.

"Good God!" he cried. "You are not going to turn me down after I have worked almost day and night for six long weeks. You can't have any idea what this means to me."

"I can't help that," she retorted stubbornly. "I would not appear in that play of yours for all the money in the world."

"But you promised to take it, Vera. You commissioned me to write this play for you. Time and again I urged you to make suggestions as to what kind of a plot you'd like. But you did not want to be bothered. You told me to go ahead and use my own ideas.

"And now, that I have done so, you fly into a rage and attempt to destroy them. I don't think you are giv-

ing me a square deal in this matter. I can't tell you how bitterly disappointed I am in you."

Miss Browning moved toward the door, thus indicating that she had no desire to prolong the painful interview.

"Alright," McLain exclaimed, desperate. "If you don't want the play, I'll produce it anyway."

She held his eyes with hers.

"I won't stand for that!" she protested. "It is criminal libel. Naturally it would have its first run in New York where I am too well known. Every man and woman in the audience would recognize in your heroine the Vera Browning they have learned to adore. The newspapers would be full of it."

Carlton McLain's senses were in confusion, and his knees were shaking.

He gathered up the manuscript with trembling fingers. So this was the end. His hatred of this unsympathetic woman was so intense that, had he followed his sudden mad impulse, he would have strangled her on the spot.

And there is no telling how it would have ended, if someone had not knocked on the library door at this moment.

"What is it?" the actress demanded shrilly.

"If you are through, come out," Guy Fillmore's voice replied. "Your friend husband has arrived."

Vera's face lit up, but before she could open the door, the playwright seized her by the shoulder. His eyes were flaming and his features were dark with uncontrollable wrath.

"You have given me a dirty deal, Vera Browning!" he hissed through his clenched teeth. "But don't forget this—there is going to be a terrible reckoning some of these days. I was a fool to think you would play fair

with me. Unless I am much mistaken your regret will come too late."

She shook him off with a rather boisterous laugh.

"Oh, go on," she cried with forced mirth. "I imagined you were a good sport. It really does not matter a great deal whether I accept your play or not. You are already famous and rich. Now be a nice boy and get over this disappointment. We have been such splendid friends."

"Friends!" McLain repeated scornfully. "I have had enough of this kind of friendship."

As he ran to the door and flung it open, she called after him:

"Don't forget that I am expecting you for dinner to-night. And I am depending on you to bring Olive Bentley and her pretty young chum."

McLain stalked out in a huff, forgetting the manuscript which lay on the table. By the time he reached the veranda he had regained his composure sufficiently to speak courteously to the folk assembled there.

He was a little surprised when young Guy Fillmore followed him down the graveled path.

"Well, what's the good news," the latter inquired. "Has Vera——"

The other wheeled suddenly.

"No, she has rejected the play, if that is what you want to know. Anything else?"

"I am sorry, old man," Fillmore returned sympathetically. "I did not want to seem inquisitive. I was very much interested in the outcome of your interview with Vera Browning. I rather felt that you would produce something worth while. What was wrong with the play?"

"I don't care to discuss that with you," McLain replied frigidly, then walked on.

Like a man in a trance the unhappy playwright proceeded in the direction of the Bentley cottage. His financial resources were at a low ebb. He had staked everything upon the play written for Vera Browning.

And now his dream of glowing success, of a substantial down-payment and rich royalties had become ashes.

With his hands buried in his coat pockets he strode on glumly, trying to figure a way out of his dilemma. He ought to have known that he could not keep step with the crowd at Bar Harbor. And yet he was broke—dead-broke.

He did not have the courage to stop in and admit his defeat to Ruth Gordon. She had been so sure of succeses for him.

But, he argued with himself, all was not lost yet. There were a number of producers in New York constantly on the lookout for good plays. His was unquestionably that, even though Vera Browning did not approve of it. Her condemnation might be another's gain.

Seated in a shady nook beside the path, Carlton McLain made a determined attempt to pull himself together. And gradually hope returned to his breast.

"What a fool I am," he admitted to himself. "Here I quarrel with a woman whose damned vanity has robbed her of all commone sense and reason. I go into a fit because she won't buy my play, when someone else might pay double the price we agreed on. Well, it's New York for me, and good-by to these highbrows."

And then McLain discovered that he had left the manuscript lying on the table in Vera Browning's library.

He struggled to his feet and started back on a trot, little dreaming what a frightful disappointment was in store for him.

Before he had gone half a dozen yards he encountered the young woman who had dressed Vera Browning's hair. She was good to look at, and he halted momentarily as if to speak to her.

The girl, however, gave him a peculiar stare and rushed past him without replying to his very pleasant salutation.

With his hat in his hand, McLain gazed after her.

"Now what do you think of that?" he grumbled to himself. "Here I am trying to be sociable, and all I get for my efforts is the glass eye."

The cold turn down of the pretty young hair dresser, had for the moment, made McLain forget his errand. He smiled, then replaced his hat on his head.

But, the next instant it all came back to him. That play—he must regain possession of it as quickly as possible.

And fighting off a vague feeling of dread, he hurried toward the Browning cottage.

Chapter 61

A WOMAN'S POWER

ALICE GORDON had proven herself an admirable actress and a shrewd perverter of the truth as well. Her success in detaining her husband and the man with him in the tower succeeded beyond her fondest expectations. But a sudden menace threatened her. The terrible panic in which she found herself so unexpectedly had been caused by the scream of a woman.

From whence it came was not quite clear to Philip Gordon. He saw the startled look on his wife's face. He saw the color go out of her cheeks, and he also felt the desperate grip her hands had on his arm.

"Oh, take me away from here!" she panted.

"Not until I find out where that scream came from," he told her. "If you feel faint or frightened, rest in that chair over there until Mike and I make an investigation."

"But I am afraid to remain alone down here," Alice gasped as Phil began to ascend the spiral stairway.

Gordon glanced at her, for a moment undecided.

She was trembling like a reed shaken by the wind. To all appearances she had been badly frightened. He felt he could not blame her for being afraid, for that scream had almost unnerved him.

With his usual consideration for the gentle sex he assisted Alice to the chair.

"If—if you give me a few minutes I'll be alright," she said in a low voice. "I'll go up with you."

Alice's one thought was to gain all the time she

could. While she sat there, her senses alert, her eyes wandered over to the stairway and back again.

A little distance away stood Phil, engaged in a whispered conversation with Mike. So the minutes past. One—two—three and then five. The woman glanced at her wristwatch. Six—Seven.

And then she heard her husband's voice.

"How do you feel now?" it asked gently.

"Much better, thanks," Alice rose to her feet and gave him one of her fascinating smiles. "It was kind of you to wait."

Together they ascended the flight of stairs which led to the top floor of the tower. Mike was in the lead, while Gordon aided his wife's progress with a strong hand.

The room they entered about a minute later was not much different than the one they just left.

Broken pieces of furniture were strewn about. In one corner stood an old bookcase. At the farther end were two doors, both tightly closed.

"Do you think that scream came from up here?" Alice asked, touching Phil's arm.

"I am not prepared to say," he replied thoughtfully. "I might have, but I am not at all sure about it. However, since we are up here, I propose to make a thorough investigation. I want to make sure whether or not the spooks in this tower are imaginary or real."

"Where do you think the scream came from?" Alice turned to Mike.

His retort caused the woman to breathe a sigh of relief.

"I don't think it came from within this tower at all," he declared with conviction. "It came from somewhere on the outside."

In the meantime Philip Gordon had approached

the solid mahogany doors. He tried the knobs and found them locked.

With a curious glance at his companions he said speculatively:

"I wonder what is in there."

"We'll find out shortly," declared Mike. "I have a number of keys here and perhaps one of them will fit."

Alice suppressed a low cry. She felt her senses reeling. If that door to the left was opened all was lost indeed.

With frantic haste her mind worked to find some way of preventing what seemed like inevitable disaster. But this time her cunning failed her. No matter how desperately she tried she could think of nothing that might turn the tide in her favor.

The man had already inserted the key in the lock, but it would not turn. He turned to his master.

"It won't work, Mr. Gordon," he said. "I guess the lock is rusty. If you want me to, I'll break the door down. It won't be much trouble."

Phil Gordon shook his head.

"No, it would be a shame to destroy a perfectly good door unless it be absolutely necessary," he retorted. "Both of them lead to closets which hold nothing that could interest us. I guess," he added with a smile, "that ends our expedition in the tower. No use searching any further."

Alice was standing near the window, both hands pressed to her heaving bosom.

What her husband's remarks meant to her no one knew but herself. The breath whistled through her teeth and she staggered slightly.

She was scarcely conscious that Phil had turned and was looking at her, obviously alarmed.

"What is the matter?" he asked, rushing to her

side. "You are ghastly pale. I hope you are not going to faint, Alice. Wait, I'll open this window and let in some fresh air."

"Don't bother, dear," the woman purred, her eyes eloquent. "I am alright. I had a little dizzy spell, but it's over now."

Gordon opened the window nevertheless. Alice moved toward the door.

Suddenly her glance fell upon a fine lace handkerchief lying on the floor. She made a dash for it, and so did her husband's assistant. In the corner of this dainty bit of lace were embroidered the letters "B. H."

Mike had been a little quicker than Mrs. Gordon. He picked the handkerchief up and began to inspect it.

"That is mine," she exclaimed in nervous haste. "I dropped it a moment ago. Please let me have it." Her fingers clutched the handkerchief eagerly and the next instant it was secreted in the closed hand. "Thank you."

While this took place Gordon was endeavoring to open another window. But it would not budge.

"Oh, what's the use," he grumbled, and desisted.

"Come Phil," his wife called pleasantly. "You see it can't be done. I have had enough of this musty air for one day. You better get a carpenter to look after those windows."

Gordon came forward and Alice took his arm. Without another word they approached the stairway and the descent began.

Once their eyes met, and for a fleeting moment he looked into his wife's passionately glowing dark orbs. His face turned red—a guilty red.

Had she guessed his thoughts?

Then his lips quickly were set in hard lines. Alice was beautiful, yes, fascinatingly beautiful; but he was determined that she should not tempt him again. There

could never again be the least intimacy between them.

As they reached the outside, Gordon gave instructions to his man.

"It would be well to watch the tower for a while, Mike," he ended, "I am still certain that someone has been prowling about in there at night. If you discover anything that looks suspicious, be sure and let me know at once."

"Very well, sir," the man replied respectfully and walked away.

And now Phil found himself in an embarrassing position. Alice was still clinging to his arm and there was something strangely compelling about her.

"I—I would like to chat with you for a little while, dear," she said coaxingly. "Can't you give me a few minutes of your time? It is so seldom that I have an opportunity to be alone with you that——"

"Have you anything in particular to say to me?" he cut her short.

"No, nothing in particular." The woman's voice was very tender. "But don't you think you—you owe me some consideration as your wife? You have been neglecting me shamefully these last months. I know I have not always been all sweetness."

He looked her over carefully—distrustfully.

Yes, there was a change in her, a very great change. She was once more the Alice he had known before he asked her to become his wife.

"You must realize that a good many things have happened which had a tendency to destroy peace between us," he said, his face averted.

"For instance," Alice shot back quickly.

"It would take too long to discuss them all. Besides, what would be the use." Gordon made a move to go, but she would not let him.

"I want to talk about those things you have in your mind, dear," she pleaded. "Come over here. I know a cozy nook where we can chat without being overheard or disturbed. Give me only ten minutes—please do."

Gordon followed his wife with visible reluctance.

The moment they were seated she took pains to bring all of her seductive charms into play. But Alice never did anything without some good reason.

And she had indeed a good reason for wanting to worm herself into her husband's confidence at this particular moment.

Phil gave her a passing glance, but he saw enough to warn him that he dare not look too deep and too long into those two limpid pools above her flushed cheeks.

"First of all," the woman began after a rather painful pause. "I want to tell you that I am very sorry for——"

"Pardon me if I refuse to believe what you are about to say," he interrupted. "Any apology you might make now can not change my opinion of you. You have had your chance."

"What—what do you mean?" Alice leaned toward him, her lips quivering. "You say I had my chance. I don't understand."

He contemplated her for a moment in silence.

"I really don't care to commit myself further," he declared, reaching for his watch. "Another quarrel would be the inevitable result. Besides, my time is limited. I have a dinner appointment in the city at twelve."

Alice drew her breath sharply and she forced her husband to meet her eyes.

"Don't you love me at all any more—not the least bit?" she murmured.

"I can't answer that question truthfully without disappointing you, Alice," came back slowly. "The only

woman I ever loved is no longer among the living. You killed even what little regard I had for you when you deliberately attempted to besmirch my first wife's memory."

"But you married me, Phil. You married me."

"Yes."

"Why. Answer me that. Why?"

Gordon hung his head.

"You married me," Alice repeated, her voice rising with passion. "And I remember distinctly that first night in Paris——"

"Spare me that," he broke in. "I know what you would say. I admit I had become a slave to a weakness which robs so many of us of our manhood. You were lovely. You were desirable. I was so miserable and craved the diversion you promised. I thought you could make me forget, but you failed—failed."

Unholy triumph rushed into the woman's heart.

Phil's words held the confession that he had once succumbed to her charms. She was still beautiful. Some of her friends told her that she was more so now.

With an impulsive move she reached over and caressed his dark hair. She saw him wince, but he did not resent the touch.

"Phil, dear," she purred. "I am sorry if I failed to be all you wanted me to be. But I have tried. God knows I tried. Do you realize what a tremendous task fate imposed on me? Do you think it was easy trying to measure up to that ideal of womanliness—your first wife? If I spoke ill of her, it was because jealousy prompted me."

Gordon could not have spoken just now if his soul's salvation had depended upon it.

He was completely under the spell of that lovely creature beside him. He had but to raise his eyes and

smile, and she would be in his arms. Her full red lips would be crushed to his.

He was scarcely conscious that the space between them on the bench was narrowing. Alice slid toward him. And then, before he could prevent it, she kissed him passionately.

"My God—don't!" he gasped, and sprang up.

But Alice merely laughed at him. And what a low, triumphant laugh it was.

She knew that she had conquered him once more with her irresistible beauty. There was not any doubt about it. As she looked at him standing there, pale and trembling she suddenly stopped laughing.

He did not draw away when she rose and went to him.

"Phil," she breathed, "why are you so cold and indifferent to me? I admit I have not always behaved like a loyal wife should. But I love you in spite of all that has happened."

And before he knew it she had thrown her arms about his neck. It seemed that he was succumbing to her compelling charm. He crushed her to him and their lips met.

Then suddenly, as if stung to the quick, he flung her from him and reteated a few steps.

The awful realization that he had proven weak rushed over him. He brushed a sleeve over his mouth and a wave of color suffused his cheeks.

"I—I had no right to — to kiss you," he stammered. "It was a mistake. I had no right, Alice."

"Why not?" The very devil was lurking in the depths of her laughing eyes. "Why not? Aren't you my husband?"

When a man runs from a woman it is because he fears her. And Philip Gordon had suddenly become

afraid of his wife. No, he could never trust her again after all the misery she had caused him.

How had she treated his helpless, innocent children? But even that did not hurt him as much as her beastly remark about Marie. She had called her an ordinary streetwalker.

But there were other things Phil did not even try to recall as he fled toward the house. And he cursed himself for having allowed Alice to wheedle him into sitting alone with her on that bench.

Long after he had disappeared, the smile lingered on Alice's face. Her full bosom heaved stormily as she muttered:

"You are not near as impregnable as you think you are, my dear boy. I am going to make you love me again before we get through. As an enemy you are too dangerous. As a lover you might amuse me, but you could never thrill me. Your soul belongs to another. Well, so does mine."

Chapter 62

THE MEETING

WHEN Carlton McLain hurried back to Vera Browning's cottage he was not a little worried about his manuscript. There was no reason why he should be. But the play meant too much to him. Even though the actress had rejected it its value, commercially, was great.

His first effort as a playwright embodied all the elements the theater-going American people fall for. There was plenty of acting and a plot so original that success seemed assured.

To his surprise McLain found the folk at the Browning cottage in a state of excitement. Mrs. Galvin, Vera's mother, could be heard half a block away expostulating and scolding.

"What is the matter?" McLain inquired as he stepped upon the veranda.

"I declare," the good woman exclaimed. "So here you are. You are the very man I want to see. I think we have just cause for complaint against you, Mr. McLain. How could you be so careless?"

"What do you mean?" the playwright asked, startled.

"Come in and see for yourself," she invited with a gesture toward the door, and she led the way into the library. "There!"

McLain, looking to where she pointed, saw along the polished surface of the table a scar of fire, and he saw a charred spot upon the rug below. At first he was reluctant to understand

"What about it?" he insisted impatiently.

"You built a bonfire on that table—that's what about it," Mrs. Galvin told him. "A great heap of paper on the table and then a lighted cigarette on top of it, and we come in here and find it all ablaze."

He turned pale.

"That—that was my play!" he cried. "What have you done with it?"

"What is left of it is there on the hearth," the woman answered.

McLain saw a mass of burned paper that crumbled to ashes under his desperately searching fingers.

It seemed impossible that the destruction could have been so complete. There were scarcely a dozen pages left untouched, and he had kept no carbon copy of the play.

Mrs. Galvin was berating him for his carelessness, but McLain did not hear. He was trying to remember —and there was cold ferocity in his thoughts—whether it could be true that he himself had set the paper afire.

He had been smoking quite a few cigarettes while reading the play to the actress.

But was it possible to take fire from a cigarette butt? He told himself mercilessly that it was not. Someone, therefore, had set a match to the manuscript.

Without a word he went back to the veranda, followed by Guy Fillmore, Vera Browning's press agent. The latter was offering his sympathy in a veritable deluge of words, but they meant nothing to the unhappy man.

Carlton McLain dropped into a chair, considering. He decided coldly that it was the sort of mischief the actress might have done.

Interpret Your Dreams Yourself!

Mehemet Ali's

Oriental Dream Book

The Most Complete Dream Book Published

Each Dream has its Significance

This Book Tells You What It Is

THE MYSTERIES OF THE FUTURE REVEALED

EGYPT, the ancient home of dreams and wonders, the oldest land of culture and science, the land where Joseph interpreted Pharao's dreams, is also the home or birth-place of our work, where it was written by the ancients many centuries ago. It went through the hands of many powerful rulers of Egypt, till it came into the possession of Mehemet Ali, the famous warrior, who made use of it during the time of his successful reign.

This book not only solves all dreams but contains as an appendix the celebrated

BISMARCK'S WHEEL OF FORTUNE, or: ANSWERS OF DESTINY

The old manuscript of the "Wheel of Fortune," as stated by competent authorities, is to be found in the private cabinet of Count Bismarck and some believe that the great success of Bismarck is owing to his consultation of the "Wheel of Fortune"; but of this we have no positive proofs except his successful deeds, which made him one of the greatest men of the century.

THE MISCELLANEOUS DEPARTMENT CONTAINS:

The art of Fortune Telling by Physiognomy, Phrenology, Astrology, also by Cards, Dominoes, Dice, Tea and Coffee Grounds, Fingers, etc., Talismans, Charms, Signs.

TO WHICH IS ADDED

The lucky numbers drawing prizes in Lotteries, at Prize Entertainments, etc., also a list of Dreams, with three lucky numbers attached, list of names for ladies and gentlemen and list of letters, each with three lucky numbers attached, also a list of lucky and unlucky days for males and females, making practically four books in one.

PRICE 35 CENTS

Agents can make large sales and earn good profits. Very easy to sell. Enclose amount in postage stamps and secure sample copy.

You can order Dream Book from person delivering this book or we send same well packed, by mail, postage prepaid, on receipt of price.

BARCLAY & CO.

P. O. Box 847
CINCINNATI, O.

Printed in U. S. A.